

**Minutes of the Regular Meeting
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education
Tuesday, March 26, 2019, 8:38 a.m. – 12:58 p.m.
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148**

Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:

Paul Sagan, Chair, Cambridge
James Morton, Vice-Chair, Boston
Katherine Craven, Brookline
Ed Doherty, Boston
Amanda Fernandez, Belmont
Maya Mathews, Student Advisory Council, Newton
Margaret McKenna, Boston
Michael Moriarty, Holyoke
James Peyser, Secretary of Education
Mary Ann Stewart, Lexington
Martin West, Newton

Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Chair Sagan convened the meeting at 8:38 a.m. and members introduced themselves. Chair Sagan noted that Mr. Moriarty and Ms. Mathews would arrive shortly.

Public Comment

- Salah E. Khelfaoui, Ph.D., Executive Director, Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual School, addressed the Board on Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual School: Renewal and Report on Probation.

Mr. Moriarty and Ms. Mathews arrived at 8:40 a.m.

- Keith Marciniak, parent, addressed the Board on concerns about wireless technology in schools.
- Kahris McLaughlin, member of the Racial Imbalance Advisory Council, addressed the Board on education funding.

Comments from Chair Sagan

Chair Sagan announced that he is concluding his service on the Board at the end of today's meeting and said he has been honored to serve as Chair for more than four years. He described the experience as daunting and humbling because the work of the Board and the Department is so important to the lives of nearly one million young people and their families. Chair Sagan said students and families rely on the Board to meet the challenges confronting all of our public schools and to promote high standards, positive outcomes, and equity for all. Chair Sagan said while the work never ends, individual terms for members are finite.

He noted that his term began in 2015 and is coterminous with the Governor. After Governor Baker's re-election this past November, Chair Sagan asked Secretary Peyser and the Governor to identify someone else to serve as Chair, and it is now time for the transition.

Chair Sagan said the Board has had constructive policy debates while remaining united around the mission to strengthen the Commonwealth's public education system so that every student is prepared to succeed in life after high school. He said in the past four years, the Board has taken action on a remarkable number of significant matters, including adopting updated curriculum frameworks for math, science, English language arts, and history and social sciences; adding an 8th grade civics course; supporting the launch of a new early college initiative; increasing access to computer science and digital literacy; improving the student assessment system; managing three districts under receiverships; and undertaking, with heavy hearts, the unexpected challenge to select a new commissioner to succeed the late Mitchell Chester. Chair Sagan added that Commissioner Riley has made a successful transition to the job and is creating his own definition of what success will look like for the Department. Chair Sagan thanked Commissioner Riley and said he has appreciated working with him in his first year on the job.

Chair Sagan said even with all these accomplishments, closing achievement gaps and bringing equity and opportunity to the most challenged students, schools, and districts will demand continued attention and remain at the heart of the Board's work. He expressed hope that the Legislature will take action this year to provide more resources to support these goals.

Chair Sagan said the Board's accomplishments are possible only because of the work of great staff at the Department. He said he hopes the staff recognizes how much the Board appreciates their effort and extended his thanks. He said he will try to remain active in public education in the future. Chair Sagan thanked Secretary Peyser for asking him to serve and said it has been an honor and a pleasure to help the students and families of the Commonwealth.

Comments from Secretary Peyser

Secretary Peyser commended Chair Sagan for his inspirational leadership and his deep belief that improvement is possible. Secretary Peyser said Chair Sagan handled the transition after the sad passing of Mitchell Chester with great steadiness and created a positive direction through the entire process, for which we all were deeply grateful. The Secretary described Chair Sagan as a thoughtful, respectful, courageous, active leader who listens well and can make tough decisions. Secretary Peyser thanked Chair Sagan for his leadership, counsel, and friendship over the years.

Secretary Peyser announced that the Governor will be appointing Katherine Craven as Board Chair. He said Ms. Craven is a worthy successor who brings deep experience from her work in the Legislature, her leadership of the Massachusetts School Building Authority, her service on this Board for five years, and her current position as Chief Administrative Officer at Babson College. He said her knowledge and experience in the intersection between education, policy, and politics at the state and local level will be a tremendous asset. Secretary Peyser congratulated Ms. Craven and said he looks forward to working with her in her new role. He added that only one seat is coterminous with the Governor; Chair Sagan occupied that seat, and to fill it, Governor Baker is appointing Matt Hills, former Chairman of the Newton School Committee, who will also be a great asset to the Board.

Ms. Craven thanked Secretary Peyser and Governor Baker for this honor. She said she has been privileged to serve on the Board for the last five years under excellent chairs: Ms. McKenna and

Chair Sagan. She thanked Chair Sagan for his patience, integrity, and commitment to all the children in the Commonwealth. Ms. Craven noted the Secretary mentioned her five children, who range from a freshman in college to a two-year-old and include one son who has disabilities. She said she looks forward to working with all members and the dedicated staff of the Department. Ms. Craven said she is honored and humbled by this appointment.

Chair Sagan appointed Ms. Craven to the Commissioner's Performance Evaluation Committee, which led by Vice-Chair James Morton.

Comments from Commissioner Riley

Commissioner Riley said it has been an honor and privilege to work with Chair Sagan and thanked him for his support. The Commissioner thanked Board members who attended the Kairos conference on March 19 and said it was good to get so many people from different facets of education talking with each other about a direction forward. He said he is gathering comments from conference attendees and then will lay out a plan in June, moving towards deeper learning for all students. Commissioner Riley said this is budget season and he recently participated in a legislative briefing, the House Ways and Means Committee education budget hearing, and a hearing on school finance legislation. The Commissioner gave an update on the New Bedford/Alma del Mar collaboration and said the New Bedford School Committee and Alma board have approved the memorandum of understanding. He added that next steps include City Council action and filing of a home-rule petition with the Legislature. Commissioner Riley also notified the Board that the Boston Public Schools will go through the state's district review process in the fall and the report should be valuable to the incoming superintendent.

Chair Sagan commented that the New Bedford/Alma del Mar collaboration is a new model that promises to serve students better and he is hopeful the parties will see it through.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the February 12, 2019 Regular Meeting.

The vote was unanimous.

Family Engagement Initiatives

Commissioner Riley said the Department is highlighting initiatives around family engagement in schools and he has seen the positive impact of family engagement during his time in Boston and Lawrence. Rachelle Engler Bennett, Associate Commissioner, Student and Family Support, explained that the panel would discuss the Parent and Community Education and Involvement Advisory Council, the family engagement framework, the statewide family engagement center (SFEC) federal grant, and the Family Institute for Student Success (FISS) Initiative. Ms. Engler Bennett said the Department will be hiring a family engagement specialist who will begin this spring. She introduced Eva Kelly, Director of Enrollment and Family Engagement for the Fitchburg Public Schools and a member of the Board's Parent and Community Education and Involvement Advisory

Council; Donna Traynham, Early Learning Team leader in the Department's Office of Student and Family Support; and Maria Campusano, Family Partnerships Manager for the Lawrence Public Schools. Each panelist gave a brief report.

Ms. Fernandez thanked the panelists for their presentations and for dispelling the myth that low-income parents do not care. Ms. Fernandez asked about the sustainability of these programs and how they connect to the districts and schools in receivership. Ms. Engler Bennett said these initiatives began in New Bedford and Lawrence because those districts had started work under a prior federal grant, and the team is assessing how best to expand the work to more communities, particularly those with school and district turnaround plans. Ms. Stewart said she looks forward to learning more about how the framework helps schools to build more effective partnerships with families. In response to a question from Vice-Chair Morton, Ms. Traynham said creating a culture of family engagement is a key to improving student outcomes, and community-based organizations are included in regional partnerships.

Chair Sagan called for a brief recess at 9:50 a.m. He reconvened the meeting at 10:00 a.m.

Chronically Underperforming Districts: Updates from Receivers

Commissioner Riley introduced John Connolly, chair of the Lawrence Alliance for Education (LAE) and Cynthia Paris, superintendent of the Lawrence Public Schools; superintendent/ receiver Stephen Zrike of the Holyoke Public Schools; and superintendent/receiver Jeffrey Villar of the Southbridge Public Schools. Senior Associate Commissioner Russell Johnston and Lauren Woo, director of the Office of Strategic Transformation, joined the panel. Mr. Johnston said connections and common themes are evident across the three districts, which are in various stages of development in their turnaround work.

Mr. Connolly and Ms. Paris discussed the changes Lawrence is undertaking through the LAE, a seven-member board that is the state-appointed district receiver. They presented highlights of the first six months under this new model, including priorities that have been identified through Supt. Paris's listening and learning campaign. The emerging themes include improving teacher recruitment and retention, strengthening systems to support at-risk students, refining the high school redesign plan, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources.

Dr. West noted that all three districts have high rates of chronic absenteeism. Supt. Paris said the Lawrence schools are addressing this concern through their school operational plans. Dr. West encouraged the district leaders to review the research on what works.

Dr. Zrike presented key accomplishments in Holyoke, including the high school redesign, opportunities for both dual enrollment and workplace learning, improved graduation and dropout rates, increased pre-K enrollment by 50% over the last four years, and expansion of dual language offerings. He highlighted improvements to translation and interpretation services for families, increases in family engagement, creation of a student advisory group, expansion of middle school options, and progress on the middle school building proposal. Dr. Zrike identified key challenges that still need to be addressed, including the need for effective academic interventions to support students who are falling behind, effective social/emotional and behavioral systems to address trauma, and ways to retain and develop a more diverse high-performing workforce. He noted the district has 25-30% teacher turnover every year.

Dr. Zrike responded to questions from members about teacher development, preschool and full-day kindergarten, and summer learning. Mr. Moriarty commented that grade 3 ELA performance is relatively strong in two schools and still a huge problem in others. He added that the Board should be aware of the challenges Gateway Cities face in funding school building projects. Vice-Chair Morton thanked Dr. Zrike for his efforts and asked about the high school redesign. Dr. Zrike said while it is a work in progress, having one principal and a common sense of mission has made a big difference.

Dr. Villar discussed the challenges he has found in Southbridge during his first year, including instability in staffing, finding and retaining talent, and budget deficits. He said the district's high-impact turnaround strategies include addressing school climate and culture, strengthening literacy programs, standards-based instruction; and improving overall systems and structures.

Ms. Fernandez noted that recruiting and retaining educators is an issue for all three districts and said Massachusetts should have a comprehensive plan for addressing this need. She asked the receivers how the Department could support their turnaround work. All three said they rely on Mr. Johnson, Ms. Woo, and their team and they are grateful for the support DESE provides.

Commissioner Riley and Chair Sagan thanked the receivers for their presentations and their ongoing work.

Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual School: Renewal and Report on Probation

Public Comment:

- John Lunt, Chair, Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual School Board of Trustees, addressed the Board on Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual School: Renewal and Report on Probation

Commissioner Riley informed the Board that he recommends renewing the certificate for the Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual School for an additional three years, the minimum provided by statute, and further recommends that the Board remove probation from the school's certificate and continue conditions to address concerns about academic results, the school's academic program, and issues related to access and equity for all students. Commissioner Riley introduced Cliff Chuang, Senior Associate Commissioner, and Alison Bagg, Director, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign. Chair Sagan said this initiative is still an experiment and has not yet demonstrated success. Mr. Chuang responded to questions from members, noting that virtual schools throughout the U.S., including the two in Massachusetts, have had disappointing results. He said the three-year renewal with conditions, coupled with an increased tuition rate that the Board approved last year, should give the school the opportunity to succeed, while retaining the Board's ability to impose probation if the school's performance worsens. Chair Sagan said the Board needs to see improvement.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with General Laws chapter 71, section 94, and 603 CMR 52.11, hereby removes probation for the Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual School (GCVS) and renews its certificate for three years and directs the school to meet the following conditions, as recommended by the Commissioner:

1. Reporting Requirements:

- a. **GCVS must continue to submit to the Department, at odl@doe.mass.edu, board meeting agendas and materials prior to each board meeting at the same time that these items are sent to the school's board members. Further, the school must submit to the Department the minutes of these proceedings as soon as the school's board approves them. The Department reserves the right to require the submission of additional information, such as quarterly or monthly financial statements, if board materials do not already include this information. The school must provide such additional information within two business days.**
 - b. **GCVS must continue to submit to the Department weekly student enrollment reports.**
2. **GCVS may enroll a maximum of 750 students.**
3. **Beginning April 1, 2019 and monthly thereafter, GCVS shall provide the Department with an update on the implementation of its plan for serving students who are English learners.**
4. **By June 30, 2019, GCVS must submit to the Department a comprehensive evaluation of the school's mathematics, English language arts, and science programs. Additionally, the comprehensive evaluation should address instruction, supports for all learners, and the degree to which all students have equitable access to the school's academic program. Such comprehensive evaluation must be conducted by an external consultant(s) acceptable to and approved in advance by the Department. The evaluation must be informed by disaggregated performance data from the statewide accountability system and aligned with the CMVS Performance Criteria.**
5. **By July 31, 2019, the school must submit to the Department for approval a comprehensive action plan (action plan) for improving academic performance and addressing other areas for improvement identified by the comprehensive evaluation. Such action plan must include a needs assessment aligned to the 2018 statewide accountability results for GCVS. The action plan must also specify the evidence-based strategies the school will use to improve performance in mathematics, English language arts, and science for all student subgroups. The plan should also include strategies to improve instruction, supports for all learners, and the degree to which all students have equitable access to the school's academic program. The action plan must set clear and specific implementation benchmarks, with a clear timetable and deadlines for completion of key tasks, sufficient to allow the school's board of trustees and the Department to monitor implementation. The school must provide evidence that it has shared its improvement plan with the school's community including, but not limited to, students, parents, and staff.**
6. **By December 31, 2021, the school must demonstrate that it is an academic success by providing evidence that the school has exhibited significant and**

sustained academic improvement in mathematics, English language arts, and science on the statewide assessment for all student subgroups.

In addition to meeting the terms of probation, GCVS must also comply with the terms of its certificate. The Commissioner shall review and report to the Board on the success or lack of success of GCVS in meeting the terms of the conditions and its certificate and, based upon his review, shall recommend such further action as he deems appropriate.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts virtual school shall be operated in accordance with the provisions of General Laws chapter 71, section 94; 603 CMR 52.00; and all other applicable state and federal laws and regulations and such conditions as the Commissioner or the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education may from time to time establish, all of which shall be deemed conditions of the certificate.

The vote was unanimous.

Student Assessment Updates:

- a) Next-Generation MCAS Tests and Standard Setting for Grade 10 English Language Arts and Mathematics**
- b) Next-Generation MCAS Achievement Level Descriptors for Grade 10 ELA and Mathematics, and Science and Technology/Engineering**
- c) Planning for the Competency Determination for the Classes of 2023 and Beyond**

Commissioner Riley introduced Jeff Wulfson, Deputy Commissioner, Michol Stapel, Associate Commissioner, and Bob Lee, Chief MCAS Analyst. Ms. Stapel updated the Board on the transition to next-generation grade 10 ELA and mathematics tests and provided an overview of key grade 10 standard-setting activities. Ms. Stapel explained the next-generation achievement level categories and descriptors. She concluded by discussing next steps and a timeline for planning for the competency determination for the classes of 2023 and beyond.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, in accordance with G.L. c. 69, §§ 1B and 1I, hereby adopts the following achievement level categories and policy-level descriptors for the next-generation MCAS tests in English language arts and mathematics in grade 10, and in science and technology/engineering in grades 5, 8, and high school, as recommended by the Commissioner:

Exceeding Expectations

A student who performed at this level exceeded grade-level expectations by demonstrating mastery of the subject matter.

Meeting Expectations

A student who performed at this level met grade-level expectations and is academically on track to succeed in the current grade in this subject.

Partially Meeting Expectations

A student who performed at this level partially met grade-level expectations in this subject. The school, in consultation with the student's parent/guardian, should consider whether the student needs additional academic assistance to succeed in this subject.

Not Meeting Expectations

A student who performed at this level did not meet grade-level expectations in this subject. The school, in consultation with the student's parent/guardian, should determine the coordinated academic assistance and/or additional instruction the student needs to succeed in this subject.

The vote was unanimous.

Chair Sagan announced a brief break at 11:38 a.m. Dr. West left the meeting. Chair Sagan reconvened the meeting at 11:48 a.m.

Charter Schools and School Finance

Chair Sagan said he asked the Department to provide an overview of charter school funding policy and practice. He added that that Board does not get to set funding; that is a legislative prerogative through statute and the state budget. Jeff Wulfson, Deputy Commissioner, introduced Alison Bagg, Director of the Office of Charter Schools; Rhoda Schneider, General Counsel; Joanna Laghetto, Finance & Data Coordinator, Office of Charter Schools and School Redesign; and Hadley Cabral, Analyst, Office of School Finance. Mr. Wulfson reviewed how charter schools are funded and their financial impact on sending districts, including tuition rates and state reimbursement to districts. He noted that the Achievement Gap Act created a requirement to identify “surplus funds” held by charter schools and return them to sending districts. In response to a question from Ms. Craven, Mr. Wulfson said no surplus funds have been identified. He continued by reviewing other funding costs for charter schools, including facility and transportation costs.

The Deputy Commissioner discussed transitional reimbursements; considerations in determining the financial impact on sending districts; considerations in measuring a district’s ability to reduce costs; and other enrollment and revenue concerns. Ms. Stewart commented that the fiscal situation in Gateway Cities might be different than in Boston. She noted that a bill has been filed that would require consideration of the financial impact of a charter on the sending district(s). Vice-Chair Morton said he would like to explore these issues further, regardless of whether the Board is authorized to consider the financial impact.

Ms. McKenna said this discussion is a helpful start and Boston is an outlier compared to Gateway Cities. Mr. Moriarty said it is hard to look at charter schools in isolation and noted they provide choices to families, including low-income families. Vice-Chair Morton said he is concerned about all families having access to high quality education for their children. Mr. Moriarty said he agrees the current system is insufficient and needs to be improved so that all families and students are well served. Secretary Peyser concurred with earlier comments that Boston’s fiscal situation is not typical; he added that in Holyoke and other Gateway Cities, the state pays almost all the costs of charter school tuition. Responding to a question from Chair Sagan, General Counsel Schneider said the charter school statute provides extensive detail about charter school finance, net school spending

caps, and related matters, indicating that fiscal issues are the Legislature's domain under current law. She added that the fact that the Legislature is considering changes to school finance, including a bill that would require the Board to consider a charter school's fiscal impact, underscores that principle.

District and School Accountability System: Potential Modifications

Commissioner Riley introduced Russell Johnston, Senior Associate Commissioner, and Rob Curtin, Associate Commissioner, who reviewed the potential changes to the district and school accountability system for 2019 reporting. Mr. Curtin explained the process for seeking public comment this spring and said the Commissioner would bring back any changes to the Board for further discussion and action in June.

Dr. Doherty asked if the Commissioner could provide some information to the Board on the safety of wi-fi in schools in light of today's public comment. Commissioner Riley said he would do his due diligence and send information to the Board.

On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

**VOTED: that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting at.
12:58 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,
Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education
and Secretary to the Board